



What's Up on the Going-to-the-Sun Road?

A Message from the Superintendent



Mick Holm
Superintendent

Since the completion of the Going-to-the-Sun (Sun) Road Rehabilitation Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), the staff at Glacier National Park and our partners from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Western Federal Lands Division, have been developing plans and designs for the rehabilitation and mitigation of the Sun Road.

This behind-the-scenes planning is essential for the park and FHWA to be poised and ready to move ahead quickly when the project is funded. The hard work of the Going-to-the-Sun Road Citizen's Advisory Committee was fundamental to the selection of the FEIS preferred alternative. The NPS ultimately selected the Advisory Committee's recommended alternative to allow for 'shared use' of the Sun Road during the core summer season (June 15 to September 15). This option allows for road rehabilitation to proceed with only short traffic delays while allowing visitors to continue driving and enjoying the Sun Road throughout the summer.

The overall goals of the National Park Service (NPS) and the FHWA for Sun Road rehabilitation and mitigation include: 1) Complete rehabilitation of the Sun Road, 2) Reduce the impact of the rehabilitation project through mitigation, and 3) Maintain and enhance the visitor experience throughout this historic road rehabilitation process.

I am pleased to announce that a critical decision was reached in late June 2005 when the NPS Development Advisory Board (DAB) approved several mitigation project elements.

We may now proceed from the planning phase to design and implementation for the following:

1) Transit System – purchase / lease and operation of transit buses; 2) design and construct the Apgar transit facility; and 3) design and implement an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) for the road.

Although some aspects of the Sun Road rehabilitation and mitigation work will still require DAB approval (i.e. long-range public information and outreach strategy), this milestone allows us to set a course for the park and FHWA staff to be poised and ready to proceed with all aspects of this enormous undertaking – mitigation such as transit, ITS, visitor experience improvements along the road, expanded public information and outreach, compliance and all other aspects of the Sun Road rehabilitation and mitigation – when funds are secured.

We will highlight and describe these project components in future newsletter as plans progress. This newsletter is intentionally abbreviated to expedite its delivery to you this summer. Graphics including photos, schematic diagrams and other reference materials can be viewed on the park's Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/glac/sunroad.htm>. We will develop this Web page specifically for information and updates about the Sun Road.

We look forward to sharing updates and progress about this important, historic project. My door is always open. Please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the park staff if you have any questions about this enormous task that will help preserve and maintain the Going-to-the-Sun Road experience.

Sincerely,

Michael (Mick) O. Holm
Superintendent

Sampling of the Going-to-the-Sun Road Rehabilitation and Mitigation reference materials on line at:

<http://www.nps.gov/glac/sunroad/whatsup.htm>

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| ■ Going-to-the-Sun Road Project Phases | ■ Preliminary St. Mary transit parking and entrance configuration |
| ■ Traffic Requirements | ■ Triple Arches masonry work |
| ■ Going-to-the-Sun Road Transit Routes | ■ Going-to-the-Sun Road Rehabilitation Plan/FEIS |
| ■ Aerial View – west side transit facility location | ■ Going-to-the-Sun Road Rehabilitation Plan/FEIS Record of Decision |
| ■ West side transit facility - schematic designs | ■ Citizen's Advisory Committee Recommendations |



Funding, Scheduling & Project Elements

After a decade of planning, public involvement and environmental and cultural analysis, the NPS and FHWA plan to begin rehabilitation of the Sun Road in June 2006. Detailed studies conducted for the Congressionally-authorized Going-to-the-Sun Road Citizen's Advisory Committee, estimate the cost of the 8-10 year project to be \$140-170 million (2002 dollars).

This funding level is necessary to provide for ongoing road work while maintaining two-way traffic throughout the core season (June 15 through September 15) with total traffic delays of 30 minutes or less for any trip across the road during peak hours (10 a.m. and 3 p.m.). Before and after peak summer hours, delays could be longer, up to two hours maximum. During peak summer hours the Sun Road will remain open. Starting in 2006 – between September 15 and June 15 – sections of the Sun Road may be impassible, but Logan Pass will always be accessible from either the east or west, weather permitting.

Federal funds for national park road rehabilitation are derived from the Federal Lands Highway Program (FLHP) via gas taxes collected at gas pumps. The last multi-year Surface Transportation Bill (Transportation Equity for the 21st Century – TEA-21) expired December 31, 2003, but has been extended under Continuing Resolutions. The next bill has not yet been passed by Congress, but other funding sources have provided \$13 million for mitigation.

Historic stone walls also require rehabilitation. Some replacement rock can be found within the park, but a substantial amount will need to come from elsewhere to restore walls along the upper Sun Road.

A sequencing plan was developed for all phases of rehabilitation to establish realistic time frames for each phase of work. This also ensures that all work is included in the timeline and that road work and mitigation can be achieved in specified time frames.

The following is our anticipated schedule for the next few years:

FY 2005 - Oct. 1, 2004 – Sept. 30, 2005:
-Complete Phases III / IV; Award Phase V
FY 2006 - Oct. 1, 2005 – Sept. 30, 2006:
-Begin Phase V; Award Phase VI
FY 2007 - Oct. 1, 2006 – Sept. 30, 2007:
-Begin Phase VI; Award Phase VII

Mitigation: Transit, ITS, Communications and Compliance

Current planning is not only focused on road rehabilitation but also on compliance, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), transit system parking and facility design, communication strategies, visitor experience improvements and expanded visitor services and transit choices at West Glacier and St. Mary.

Transit Facility, Not a Visitor Center - Working within the framework of the Sun Road Rehabilitation Plan/FEIS, a decision was made to build a west side transit support facility to serve as a hub for shuttle users and will be a primary source of real time information about travel options within the park. It will be located near the intersection of the Sun Road and the Camas Road. This location was previously identified and analyzed for a visitor center in Glacier's General Management Plan. The new transit facility will NOT be designed to become a new west side visitor center, but at some point in the future we hope to build a visitor center near the new transit facility. Transit facility planning is also underway to design a comparable transit operation at St. Mary. Since the west side facility will provide the necessary infrastructure for a fleet of transit vehicles and other information support services, the St. Mary transit facilities will involve a much smaller degree of work. Details are pending.

Transit System - Transit and ITS are two initiatives being pursued to offset the negative impacts of road rehabilitation on the regional economy and visitor experience. While the Sun Road Rehabilitation Plan/FEIS evaluated various strategies, they did not provide enough detail to implement such a system.

Native American park tours and historic red bus tours will continue. Transit shuttle service will provide an additional transit option for visitors to help reduce congestion on the Sun Road during the road rehabilitation. To ensure that a transit and ITS system are both in place by 2007, the NPS and FHWA awarded contracts last winter to develop detailed transit and ITS operation plans.

The transit operation plan addresses shuttle system operations and infrastructure and the ITS plan addresses real-time traveler information and options.

Communications – As part of the park's long range mitigation planning, a private contractor is currently developing a range of strategies about how to most effectively and efficiently expand public information efforts. This plan will also provide key messages to share with the public about the Sun Road rehabilitation and mitigation measures. It will undergo a value analysis in September 2005 and the selected strategy will be presented to the NPS DAB for approval. Once approval is obtained, a long-range contract will be bid to provide the various public information tools and products.

Compliance – Although much of the overall rehabilitation project is covered under the recent Sun Road Rehabilitation Plan/FEIS, there will be a need for further environmental and cultural analysis of options to deal with shuttle bus traffic and heavy equipment traveling through the West Glacier entrance, and alternatives for retrofitting the St. Mary entrance station and parking lot to accommodate shuttle bus traffic. Compliance review is also ongoing for each phase of planning and road rehabilitation.

"What's Up on the Going-to-the-Sun Road?" is the official National Park Service newsletter for the rehabilitation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road and concurrent mitigation programs in Glacier National Park. Contributions to this publication are from the National Park Service and Western Federal Lands Division, Federal Highway Administration.

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